

Revamping of working of Ministry of Defence

3681. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government propose to pay greater emphasis to revamp the working of the Ministry of Defence;
- (b) whether greater financial autonomy is proposed to be granted to the Ministry in financial decision-making; and
- (c) what other steps are being taken to challenge the external threat faced by the nation?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The Government continuously endeavours to effect improvements in the structures, processes and procedures to ensure most optimal utilization of the scarce national resources. The Government constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) on 17th April, 2000 to thoroughly review the national security System in its entirety and, in particular to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee and formulate specific proposals for implementation. The GoM has made detailed recommendations for reforming the National Security System including questions relating to the Delegation/operation of Financial powers to and in the Ministry. The recommendations of the GoM have been presented to the Prime Minister on 26.2.2001.

(c) After examination and acceptance of the Report, action as required will be taken expeditiously.

Repatriation of Social Security Collected from Indian holding HI-B Visa

3682. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA': Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether there is a demand to get a part of the social security collected from Indians holding HI-B Visa repatriated;
- (b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether Government would take it up with the US Government; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAMRAJU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Resumption of Indo-Australia Military Ties

3683. MISS MABEL REBELLO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and Australia recently resumed military ties, which were jerked off the rails after the 1998 Pokharan nuclear tests, when both countries withdrew their military attaches and other military contacts came to a grinding halt;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) by when an agreement between the two countries would be signed resuming supply of defence equipments to India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAMRAJU): (a) Yes, Madam.

(b) and (c) Normal defence ties between India and Australia were restored in principle during the visit of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to India from March 21—24, 2000. Subsequently a defence delegation led by Mr. Hugh White, Deputy Secretary (Strategy), Department of Defence, Government of Australia visited India from 25-28 May, 2000 to discuss with Indian authorities the resumption of these ties. In accordance with agreements reached in these discussions, Australia's Defence Adviser has resumed his post in New Delhi in January, 2001 while GOI is also in the process of nominating a Defence Adviser to Australia.